

CHAPTER 4 REDEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

A Redevelopment Element is not required by Georgia Minimum Planning Standards, yet redevelopment is an increasingly important policy issue in Roswell necessitating a detailed element of its own. This chapter supplements and builds on the economic development policies, the first (and highest priority) of which is commercial redevelopment.

Efforts during the last four years in Roswell have focused extensively on redevelopment issues. Such efforts have included a study and plan for redevelopment in Midtown Roswell; convening a Redevelopment Task Force which articulated an overall redevelopment strategy (approved by Mayor and Council on January 22, 2003 and presented in this chapter); preparation of a study and plan for the Holcomb Bridge Road corridor redevelopment east of Georgia Highway 400; and corridor improvement programs that have leveraged state and federal funds. This chapter consolidates the City's redevelopment strategy and adopted redevelopment plans (by reference and summary), which together provide a unified set of strategies, programs, assessments, and suggestions for strengthening redevelopment prospects in Roswell.

REDEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OVERVIEW

This section is an edited version of the redevelopment strategy of the City of Roswell adopted in 2003.¹ The purpose of this Redevelopment Strategy is to examine Roswell's vacant and underutilized commercial space and surrounding residential areas in need of rehabilitation, and to present a strategy for promoting redevelopment, including incentives, to achieve an optimal mix of uses.

Having an economically sound commercial sector is important to the City for reasons including:

- (1) the quality of the goods and services that are provided to Roswell's citizens;
- (2) the contribution to Roswell's tax base from commercially valued property, business license fees, and sales tax revenues; and
- (3) the employment opportunities that are provided in commercial areas.

Redevelopment is a major issue for Roswell because much of its commercial space was developed during a major growth spurt in the 1980s, and much of this space is in need of upgrading. In addition, other factors have led to a decline in some of Roswell's retail centers. Roswell is not alone, however, and many communities throughout the metro Atlanta region, as well as the nation, are facing the challenges of redevelopment. This strategy builds on and will feed into work done in cooperation with the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) and other local governments examining issues of suburban redevelopment.²

¹ The strategy is the product of the Redevelopment Task Force appointed by Councilwoman Lori Henry in the spring of 2002. In addition to Ms. Henry, the Task Force consists of developer Richard Dippolito; Roswell resident Stacy Loftin; Planning Commission member Jim Mellor; and Lonnie Mimms of Mimms Enterprises. Community Development Director Kathleen Field, the Mayor's Executive Assistant Neva Arend and Economic Development Director Melanie Chen served as staff liaisons to the Task Force. (Note: Jennifer Fine now serves as the City's Economic Development Manager.)

² In March 2002, under the direction of Councilwoman Paula Winiski, the City of Roswell co-sponsored a Symposium on Suburban Redevelopment with the ARC and the Urban Land Institute. Key elements and concepts from that symposium have been incorporated in this strategy and tailored to Roswell's situation.

Redevelopment Principles

Basic redevelopment principles are articulated clearly in Geoffrey Booth's work:³

1. Understand your position in the market.
2. Build community support.
3. Develop a vision and a plan.
4. Stress results over regulation.
5. Break up superblocks and optimize connectivity.
6. Embrace mixed use.
7. Honor the human scale by creating a pedestrian-friendly place.
8. Think transit – think density.
9. Create a public/private partnership.
10. Share and manage parking.

The First Principle, *“Understand Your Position in the Market,”* is addressed in this strategy, which examines the demographics and market trends in Roswell and surrounding areas.⁴ The creation of the Redevelopment Task Force not only addressed the need to understand Roswell's position in the market, but was also the start of the effort to *“Build Community Support”* (Principle Two), which will continue in the implementation of this strategy.

Principle Three, *“Develop a Vision and a Plan,”* is accomplished in part by adoption of this redevelopment strategy, and to a greater extent, through detailed studies such as the Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan. Principle Four, *“Stress Results Over Regulation,”* is dealt with in this strategy, which presents tools and incentives to complement regulation. Principles Five through Eight (*“Break up Superblocks and Optimize Connectivity; Embrace Mixed Use; Create Pedestrian Friendly Places; and Think Transit/Think Density”*) are discussed in this strategy, which provides a framework for determining the optimal use of land. Principle Nine, *“Create a Public/Private Partnership,”* is also discussed in this strategy's implementation plan, as is Principle Ten, *“Share and Manage Parking.”*

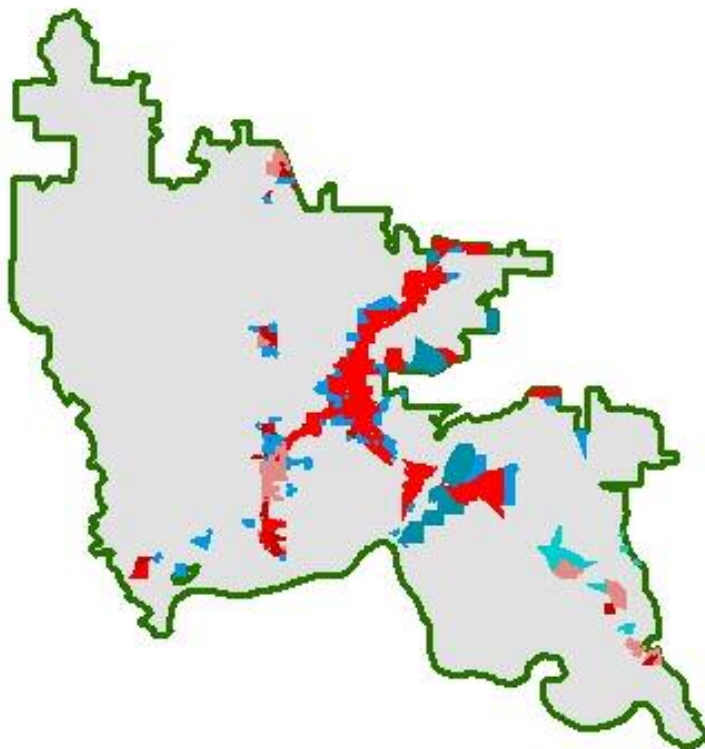
Study Area

The study area established for the Redevelopment Strategy consists of the main commercial corridors of the City, as depicted in Map 4.1. Note that the Parkway Village District area has been excluded deliberately, since most of the Parkway Village District was only recently developed or has not yet been developed commercially, and is therefore not expected to be a candidate for redevelopment for many years.⁵

³ “Ten Principles for Reinventing America's Suburban Business Districts”

⁴ Demographic information provided in the Redevelopment Strategy has been omitted here, since population and economic trends are assessed in detail in other elements (chapters) of the Comprehensive Plan.

⁵ The Task Force correctly concluded that it was premature to speak of the need for commercial redevelopment in the Parkway Village corridor. There are other issues associated with redevelopment in the corridor however, with regard to the conversion of single-family dwellings which have converted from residential to office use.



COLOR LEGEND

Red

C-3 – Highway Commercial

Beige

C-1 – Central Commercial

Blue

O-P – Office-Professional

Blue/Green

OCMS – Office-Commercial
Multi-Story Mixed Use

Green

Roswell Planning Area

Map 4.1
Redevelopment Study Areas
(Commercial and Office Zones)

The study area comprises approximately 2,029 acres of land zoned for commercial use, as shown in Table 4.1 below. While this represents only around 8 percent of the total acreage of the City, it accounts for approximately 20 percent of the property tax base.

Table 4.1
Roswell Office and Commercial Zoning Districts and Acreage, 2003

Zoning Category	Total Acreage
C-1	118
C-1 (FC) ⁶	142
C-2	100
C-2 (FC)	8
C-3	925
O-I (FC)	82
O-P	340
OCMS	220
OPMS	94
TOTAL	2,029

⁶ (FC) stands for Fulton County. The zoning along the easternmost portion of Holcomb Bridge Road was annexed with zoning designations of Fulton County. They were designated (FC) in order to distinguish them from Roswell zoning categories with the same abbreviation.

In addition, the Redevelopment Task Force examined land zoned for multifamily residential use. As of 2002, there were approximately 9,261 apartment units in the City of Roswell, representing close to 100 percent build-out for all land zoned multifamily residential. This land use category is important to redevelopment because it frequently abuts retail centers.

Midtown Roswell Study and Plan

Midtown Roswell extends along Alpharetta Highway from Norcross Street north to Mansell Road. This area is characterized by small strip retail with an overabundance of curb cuts, a high accident rate, and an aesthetically chaotic environment. Midtown Roswell is the subject of its own Redevelopment Study, which began in June 2002 under the direction of Councilwoman Lori Henry and resulted in a plan approved by Mayor and Council on January 6, 2003. Various consultants were hired by the City to conduct studies to address traffic and pedestrian safety issues⁷ and create a long-term vision for the development of the area.⁸ The studies were also prepared with the hopes of being able to qualify for additional funding under the Atlanta Regional Commission's Livable Centers Initiative. The Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan also includes recommendations for the Roswell Town Center Mall area at the intersection of Alpharetta Highway and Holcomb Bridge Road.

Holcomb Bridge Road East of Georgia Highway 400

Another area which has been identified for special study and is currently being studied is the Holcomb Bridge Road area east of State Route 400 to the Gwinnett County line, which has been plagued by high retail vacancy rates.⁹ This strategy document will propose tools that may be tailored for use in that area.

Other Potential Redevelopment Study Areas

Other distinct geographic areas with redevelopment potential include Brannon Square and South Atlanta Street.

Demographic Trends and Market Outlook

Demographic trends projected for the North Fulton market by the Redevelopment Strategy were that growth will continue, although the growth rate may decrease; the area will become more diverse, although only slightly; average income will remain above the national and state averages and will continue to climb; and the median age will remain close to the national median age of 35.3.

According to information provided by Robert Charles Lesser & Co. as part of the Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan, the population of Roswell is expected to be made up of single person households to a greater degree in the future than it has in the recent past. A DemographicsNow Report estimates that in 2007, married households with children will

⁷ Alpharetta Street Safety Study. In 1999, two pedestrians were killed trying to cross Alpharetta Street. The City's Transportation Department contracted with Street Smarts to conduct a pedestrian safety study of the corridor and to recommend improvements. Various alternative proposals for enhancing pedestrian safety were considered.

⁸ Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan, by Glatting-Jackson.

⁹ Prior to this study, two large retailing spaces were vacant. Since then, they have been reoccupied. This study and plan is being prepared by Robert & Company and is still ongoing at the time of this writing (March 2005).

represent only 29 percent of the household population, as opposed to 34 percent in 1990; married households with no children will make up 24 percent in 2007 as opposed to 30 percent in 1990; and single-person households will rise to 22 percent in 2007 from 19 percent in 1990. These projections imply that the housing stock may trend towards smaller houses, and the retail mix may also shift towards singles.

From a demand standpoint, Roswell retailers draw from more than just the City of Roswell. Both in terms of commuters who pass through Roswell and shoppers who make a point of visiting Roswell, the City draws traffic from outside its boundaries. The west side of Roswell draws from East Cobb, Dunwoody, Sandy Springs, Alpharetta and Cherokee County. The east side of Roswell draws from all these and Gwinnett County as well. These areas share generally similar demographics with Roswell: Gwinnett County is slightly younger and more family-oriented, and Sandy Springs/Dunwoody is slightly older. All of these areas have above average incomes.

From a supply side standpoint, some of Roswell's older retail areas have been eclipsed in the past decade or more by the construction of North Point Mall in Alpharetta (just northeast of the City) and the Avenue at East Cobb (to the west of the City). Alpharetta has over 5 million square feet of retail space, with a reported vacancy rate of just 4 percent (2002), showing the strength of that market. The East Cobb retail market, which includes the Cumberland Mall and Vinings Jubilee areas, has nearly 12 million square feet of space with a reported vacancy rate of 12 percent (2002). The Sandy Springs area has around 5 million square feet of retail space with a reported vacancy rate of around 13 percent (2002).

In comparison, Roswell's retail vacancy rate was a reported 11 percent (2002). Not all retail space in Roswell is aging, however. Roswell's Parkway Village District along Highway 92 has been viewed recently as a "hot" mixed-use area, and it has drawn many retailers and restaurants to locate there in the past decade. It is anticipated that this area will continue to see growth, due to the availability of land, high household incomes, and excellent access in the corridor. It also has the advantage of being far enough away from Northpoint Mall to warrant duplication of some of the same stores that are found in the Northpoint area. The Parkway Village area may be seen as direct competition to some of the older retail areas of Roswell, particularly in the Roswell Town Center Mall area.

It is difficult to say precisely how much land remains to be developed commercially in Parkway Village because the overlay permits both residential and commercial uses, and because the ability to develop land in Parkway Village depends in part on parcel assembly issues. However, it is estimated that approximately 50 to 75 acres might be developed for retail purposes in the coming years, yielding perhaps 500,000 square feet of additional retail space.

REDEVELOPMENT PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT

Finding #1: Roswell has too much retail space.

According to the FirstCLS database, Roswell has 4.9 million square feet of retail space, of which approximately 11 percent was vacant in November 2002. While the retail vacancy rate is not unduly high, the amount of retail space per capita is. The national average of retail space per person in shopping centers is 20 square feet according to statistics published by the National Research Bureau Shopping Center Database. Roswell's average is 60 square feet, although that includes all retail space, not just the space in shopping centers. This would seem to indicate that, unless Roswell is able to attract a large number of retail customers from

surrounding areas who are not adequately served in their own jurisdictions, the City has a surplus of retail space. Furthermore, as the inventory of space provided above indicates, the areas surrounding Roswell also have an abundance of retail space. Alpharetta, in particular, has added retail space at a rapid rate in the decade.

Another way to estimate retail demand is to do an analysis of income and expenditures. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, consumers spent about 24 percent of their before-tax income on retail products and services. Median household income in Roswell in the year 2000 was \$71,726, which yields a total of \$539,253,282 in retail spending for the estimated 31,326 households in Roswell in 2002. This would work out to average retail sales per square foot of \$109 for the 4.94 million square feet of space in the City. Most retailers require sales of \$150 to \$250 per square foot to be sustainable. Put another way, if all of the retail space in Roswell were modernized and rents were raised accordingly, this would not be sustainable without significant inflows of expenditures from other areas. Certainly, the trade area for many Roswell retailers at present is larger than the City boundaries. However, it is also true that many Roswell households spend retail dollars outside of the City limits, namely, at the North Point Mall area.

Projected population growth in and around Roswell may lead to increased demand and increased need for retail space. However, the availability of land in the Parkway Village District, in some scattered areas throughout Roswell, and in Alpharetta means that new retail development on raw land is likely to continue for several years, which will add retail space to the market. Therefore, it seems wise to encourage the redevelopment of some of Roswell's existing retail space into other uses and discourage rezoning additional land to commercial/retail uses.

Finding #2: Roswell's average retail rent is relatively low.

The rents received in Roswell's commercial areas tend to vary widely depending on both the age of the structure and its location, but in general are lower than surrounding areas. The lowest minimum rental rate was around \$8 per square foot (per year) and the highest was around \$28, with only around 33 percent of the properties receiving more than \$16 per square foot per year. In Sandy Springs, the rents range from \$6 to \$30, with 40 percent receiving at least \$16. In Alpharetta, the minimum rents range from \$8 to \$35 and over 80 percent of the properties receive more than \$16. Since Roswell's household income demographics are similar to those of Alpharetta and Sandy Springs, this implies that Roswell has become more of a bargain center and low-rent service destination, and that the other areas contain the more economically productive retailers. Since the growth of Alpharetta's retail sector, Roswell has gone from being a regional draw to more of a local service oriented market. Roswell needs to recapture its share of the higher-end market.

Finding #3: Roswell's retail structures are in need of updating.

The retail sector is characterized by change. Space requirements and configurations are constantly evolving, just as the retail products themselves are constantly being reinvented in order to attract the attention of the consumer. The FirstCLS database lists 81 different retail properties in Roswell and shows age data for 66 of those properties. The average Roswell retail property was built in 1985. Nine of the 81 properties are described as having been renovated. Given that the retail sector has changed dramatically in the last 20 years, many of Roswell's retail structures are currently in need of renovation, or at least some updating. In general, larger properties make more attractive redevelopment targets than smaller projects, particularly for attracting national brand retailers. However, Roswell is fortunate to have many small business

owners and developers who are attracted to smaller sites. In addition, Roswell has seen the redevelopment of some of its smaller sites for drug stores, banks, convenience stores and similar products.

The average size of the retail properties in Roswell is 60,000 square feet. The largest property is Roswell Town Center Mall at 392,000 square feet, followed by King's Market at 314,000 square feet and Roswell Corners at 310,000 square feet. Roswell has 24 properties with over 90,000 square feet. Other physical characteristics of retail centers that need to be considered are: access (ability of customers to reach the general site area), ingress and egress (specific entry and exit ease), road patterns (surrounding the site area), parking, design quality, pedestrian amenities, visibility and parking. The standards for many of these attributes have changed over time. In order to remain competitive, retail centers must be modernized to reflect changed circumstances and meet customer expectations. Retailers often deal with subjective criteria, and the perception of a center's status can sometimes be linked to psychological factors that are not easily quantified.

Table 4.2
Assessment of Various Characteristics of Roswell's Retail Centers

Description of Center or Area	Access	Ingress and Egress	Road Patterns	Design Quality	Pedestrian Amenities	Visibility	Parking
Roswell Town Center Mall area	Good	Congested	Not enough connectivity	Fair	Fair	Good	Good
Kings Market area	Convoluted	Good	Congested	Fair	Fair	Limited	Good
Holcomb Woods Parkway area	Good	Good	Good	Needs improvement	Limited	Mixed	Good
South Atlanta Street	Poor	Poor	Poor	Mixed	Poor	Good	Limited
Midtown Roswell	Fair	Poor	Not enough connectivity	Poor	Poor	Good	Limited
Hwy 9 North Strips	Fair	Fair	Mixed	Mixed	Limited	Mixed	Varies
Brannon Square area	Good	Fair	Good	Needs improvement	Limited	Good	Good

The Roswell Town Center Mall area is at the intersection of two of the busiest roads in North Fulton County. It suffers from congestion and not enough connectivity. The Kings Market area has generally good ingress and egress, parking, design and pedestrian amenities, but it is not readily visible from Holcomb Bridge Road and has access problems. The Holcomb Woods Parkway area has good access, ingress/egress, roads and parking, but only mixed visibility, and the overall design needs upgrading. South Atlanta Street has good visibility but a host of other problems, and Midtown Roswell is nearly the same. The strip centers along Highway 9 north of the Town Center area are fairly well positioned, with some upgrading in design and road patterns required. The Brannon Square area is generally well positioned, but needs improvement in design quality and pedestrian amenities.

Finding #4: Limited Lifespan of Big Boxes adds to the problem.

Given the changing nature of retail, and fierce competition, many big box retailers choose to build to very low durability standards. Inexpensive construction materials and no-frills design are the hallmark of many of the nation's top big boxes. The intent from the outset is to occupy the building for no more than 8 to 10 years, and then move on. This type of retail is not an investment in the community. Often, it leaves behind an overly large structure that cannot be easily subdivided and is difficult to lease. The vacant structure then leads to blight. The vacancy also hurts neighboring retail.

Finding #5: Deliberate vacancies hurt neighboring retail.

Many national retailers, both large and small, continue to lease vacated space rather than sublease it to a potential competitor. That not only thwarts competition, it also hurts neighboring retail, particularly in the case of anchor stores which are expected to generate traffic for the rest of the center.

Other Findings.

A review of police crime statistics reveals that Roswell's retail spaces do not seem to experience an undue amount of crime. Roswell has several aging apartment complexes that would benefit greatly from renovation. This would aid the redevelopment of retail centers adjacent to these apartment complexes.

FRAMEWORK FOR DETERMINING OPTIMAL USE OF LAND

Recommendation #1: Roswell's commercial redevelopment should not only be contained and buffered but also integrated with surrounding residential areas.

Commercial development should not threaten or encroach upon the viability of Roswell's neighborhoods; that adequate buffers should be maintained; and that interface between commercial and residential neighborhoods should be carefully considered.

Recommendation #2: Roswell's redevelopment should build on its sense of place.

In tallying the needs of Roswell's neighborhoods, the Comprehensive Plan notes a lack of public gathering places where neighbors can meet and a lack of identity or distinctiveness in many areas of the City. This suggests that the type of development seen in the Historic District might be considered a model to be replicated in adjacent areas such as Midtown Roswell, and throughout the City. The application of design standards to require quality construction materials will also help to prevent limited lifespan buildings. This principle is true for both redevelopment and new construction.

Recommendation #3: Roswell should continue to encourage neighborhood retail and the updating of outmoded centers.

While too much retail can be detrimental, a lack of appropriate retail can also be a problem. Having adequate availability of goods and services to meet the needs of its residents is an important element of the quality of life in the City. When residents have to travel outside their neighborhood to buy daily necessities and essential items, this negatively impacts their quality of life. In general, Roswell's demographics ensure that retailers have a strong interest in having

a sales presence in the community. However, the area on Holcomb Bridge Road east of GA 400 has seen a number of stores relocate or close due to national, rather than local, conditions.

In addition, when commercial centers become outmoded, retailers and their customers tend to go elsewhere, leading to a downward spiral of vacancies and disinvestment. Roswell needs to encourage the updating of commercial centers by examining its regulations to determine if there are factors inhibiting redevelopment, and to provide guidance on the type of redevelopment that would be appropriate in the City. In particular, redevelopment efforts should be focused on "pulsing" retail improvements at nodes to break up continuous strip development. Design guidelines should be applied to these nodes to ensure a strong sense of place and greater likelihood of continued retail success. If necessary, the City should undertake detailed redevelopment plans for specific geographic areas such as King's Market to develop a comprehensive effort to encourage redevelopment.

Recommendation #4: Deliberate vacancies should be discouraged.

The use of deliberate vacancies as a strategic policy by national retailers to prevent competition leads to blight and should be discouraged. The City should consider adopting an ordinance that targets this practice. Retailers who prefer not to sublease the space they have vacated should be required to terminate their lease and pay the accompanying penalty, or donate the use of the property to a governmental or non-profit entity.

Recommendation #5: A balanced tax base should be maintained.

From the vantage point of building a balanced economy, having some commercial development is essential. Commercial property is generally valued higher than residential property, per acre, as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3
Roswell Taxed Property Values Per Acre by Zoning District
(Includes land and structures)

ZONING DISTRICT	DOLLAR VALUE PER ACRE
C-1	500,726
C-1 (FC)	463,801
C-2	562,504
C-2 (FC)	390,801
C-3	743,602
CUP (FC)	508,157
OCMS	819,222
O-I (FC)	332,300
O-P	658,035
OPMS	571,684
R-1	281,573
R-3	320,392

ZONING DISTRICT	DOLLAR VALUE PER ACRE
R-3 (FC)	353,750
R-4	585,763
R-4 (FC)	556,144
R-4A	119,576
R-4A (FC)	465,550
R-TH	428,713

Recommendation #6: Some retail should be converted to office.

According to the Department of Labor, Roswell has a workforce of 35,463 persons living within the City limits [see also the Economic Development Element (Chapter 3)]. This is roughly equivalent to the number of jobs within the City, which was estimated to be around 40,000 in 2002. However, a large number of these jobs are retail and service jobs in the City (approximately 37 percent) which are generally low-paying. The result is that many persons who live in the City must commute outside the City to find employment. This results in a high amount of travel time for all and does not represent optimal use of land.

The City's Economic Development Action Plan (see end of Chapter 3) calls for an increase in the amount of office space in the City. Currently, Roswell has 3.6 million square feet of office space, with a vacancy rate of 20 percent. This is a small portion of the entire North Fulton office market, which has nearly 19 million square feet of office space, mainly in Alpharetta. While the short-term outlook for the Roswell office market is not good, the long-term outlook remains favorable. As of 2002, there was a surplus of office space in Roswell, mirrored in North Fulton, metro Atlanta and the nation, due to the national economic downturn and reduction in hiring. A rebound of the Roswell office market was predicted for 2003 or 2004, since the resumption of hiring by large corporations generally follows the upturn in the economy by about a year. Roswell is well positioned to capture demand as the economy turns around. Roswell has a well educated workforce, high quality of life, good telecommunications infrastructure, central location and over 2,000 home-based businesses that might generate demand for office space as they grow.

Recommendation #7: Some retail should be converted to residential.

Housing balance is important to the City. The Comprehensive Plan supports, among other things: measures to provide housing for the upper spectrum (i.e., elderly) of the life cycle; regulatory reforms that reduce housing costs without compromising essential public purposes of land use regulation; and consideration of additional affordable housing and community development programs. Some housing needs are hard to meet given Roswell's market conditions (high land values) and policy conditions (low-density zoning). The only practical way to meet these needs is to allow some higher density housing in the City. Since the Comprehensive Plan calls for keeping the existing mix of single to multi-family housing, it should be possible to add higher density multifamily housing (townhomes) to the commercial redevelopment mix, as long as this development is balanced by the equivalent proportion of units of single family housing. The Comprehensive Plan also calls for multi-family housing to be allowed to be mixed with commercial sites and uses within designated "activity centers."

Recommendation #8: Redevelopment needs to be green, but economically feasible.

The Comprehensive Plan contains a number of environmental strategies that apply to development, including redevelopment. These have several implications for redevelopment. The first is that redevelopment in lieu of new development benefits the environment. This may seem obvious but it strengthens the rationale for providing certain incentives or subsidies for redevelopment as outlined in this strategy.

The second is that it may be appropriate for the City to acquire land near streams or to have such land donated in order to create a greenway system. Another point to consider is that most existing development contains more impervious surface than would be allowed under current rules. Thus, it is imperative that best management practices for stormwater retention be instituted as part of the redevelopment process. This can increase the costs of redevelopment substantially, and act as a disincentive if not handled carefully. One possible solution for smaller parcels is to provide common stormwater treatment facilities (e.g., regional detention), either provided for a fee or facilitated by the City.

Recommendation #9: Some retail should be converted to schools and religious institutions.

Schools are an important element of Roswell's quality of life and contribute to maintaining high property values. The Comprehensive Plan encourages the continued development of both public and private educational facilities. Similarly, religious institutions are an important part of the community. However, the Comprehensive Plan notes that there have been some problems associated with locating schools and churches in residential areas, as has been the practice. Hence, steering new churches toward commercially developed areas appears to be a viable strategy. Locating schools and churches in existing commercial centers would in effect replace some redundant commercial space, particularly if the schools and churches purchase properties and make substantial improvements to them.

Recommendation #10: Redevelopment should be mixed-use and transit-friendly.

Traffic and congestion are among the top issues concerning Roswell's residents, and the City's Transportation Plan places emphasis on improving the flow of traffic as much as possible. That plan includes traffic calming measures for the City's neighborhoods and support for regional planning efforts to increase the effectiveness of major highways such as Georgia 400. Despite these efforts, congestion in the metro Atlanta region will continue to worsen due to the segregated nature of development in many areas including Roswell. Therefore, the Atlanta Regional Commission has developed a Regional Development Plan (RDP) with policies that strongly encourage mixed-use development and redevelopment. The RDP also encourages transit-oriented development. Some of Roswell's older commercial areas are located on bus routes but could be improved to allow transit service to be provided in a more efficient, cost-effective and customer-friendly manner.

Recommendation #11: Redevelopment requires inter-departmental cooperation.

In order to accomplish redevelopment goals, the City needs to involve its various departments in addressing the problems identified in the findings listed above. Traffic congestion and stormwater management are two examples of issues that transcend the Community

Development Department. The effective implementation of this Redevelopment Strategy will require the collaboration of many City departments.

TOOLS AND INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE REDEVELOPMENT

Market forces lead to redevelopment in many cases, and Roswell has seen much redevelopment occur without intervention from the government. Examples include the redevelopment of the old Sam's Club on Alpharetta Highway to the Andretti Speed Lab, and the redevelopment of the former Roswell High School to the Liberty Lofts condominium and townhome development. All of these involved changes in use but the retention of the existing building structures. Roswell has also experienced redevelopment involving the demolition of older structures and their replacement with new structures such as the Walgreen's on the corner of Mansell Road and Alpharetta Highway (SR 9).

However, the City prefers not to wait passively for redevelopment to occur in a haphazard manner. This strategy identifies actions that can be taken to encourage timely and appropriate redevelopment. This section provides a list of the various tools that can be used together and their relevance to Roswell.

INFRASTRUCTURE

One of the most widely accepted tools used to promote economic development is the provision of infrastructure (i.e., streetscape improvements, access roads, parking decks, traffic signals, and shared stormwater management facilities, etc.). The provision of infrastructure is an acknowledged role for government and does not discriminate against individual businesses. In the case of redevelopment, the provision of infrastructure can help to improve an area's functional and visual appeal. It can also signal that the local government is committed to the revitalization of an area, helping to draw subsequent private investment. Well-designed infrastructure programs can pay for themselves in the rise in property values that they generate.

Tool #1: Streetscape Improvement Programs.

Streetscape improvements can help achieve interconnectivity between commercial areas and the surrounding neighborhoods, add to the sense of place, and make an area more pedestrian and transit-friendly. These generally consist of upgrading sidewalks and adding designer lighting fixtures, benches, trash receptacles and water features. A related element is burying or consolidating utilities to eliminate multiple overhead wires, but that requires great expense.

Streetscape programs can be initiated by the City, by property owners, or a combination of both. Such programs are probably most appropriately provided by the City where parcel sizes are small and by the developer where parcel sizes are large. Where parcel sizes are large, the property owner should be encouraged to undertake streetscape improvements internal to the site to complement those on the public right of way. When streetscape programs are implemented by the City, they can be financed through general fund revenues, special taxation districts, Downtown Development Authority bonds, or state and federal tax programs. In Roswell, this tool would be well-suited for use in Midtown Roswell, Brannon Square and South Atlanta Street and might also be used in the area on Holcomb Bridge Road east of GA 400.

Tool #2: Access Roads.

As noted in Table 4.2, access issues are among the most prominent concerns that arise when centers become outmoded. In some cases, the City may wish to budget for the provision of road infrastructure as an incentive to promote the revitalization of an area. While the City may not be able to directly provide access roads to remedy all situations, it may find it possible to undertake public/private partnerships to provide access roads in other cases. The City can also use its zoning authority to encourage property owners to plan for inter-parcel access. In Roswell, this tool is well suited for use in Midtown Roswell, along South Atlanta Street, and in the area on Holcomb Bridge Road east of GA 400.

Tool #3: Parking Decks.

Parking decks are frequently used to promote growth in areas where there is relatively high density or where densification is occurring with little or no room for additional surface parking. Parking decks can be built and operated by municipal parking authorities or by downtown development authorities as well as by private individuals or companies. When municipalities build parking decks, there would likely need to be partial cost-recovery but some subsidy might be required. In Roswell, this tool might be appropriate for South Atlanta Street and Canton Street (within the local historic district) and Midtown Roswell.

Tool #4: Signalization and Traffic Management.

Intersection improvements are usually a part of every local jurisdiction's budget, and making wise use of the funds budgeted for signalization can help spur redevelopment. Coordination of signal timing and other traffic management tools should also be deployed to ensure that redevelopment goals are being met. In Roswell, this tool would be suited for use in the Town Center Mall area, the area on Holcomb Bridge Road east of GA 400, the area around Brannon Square, along South Atlanta Street, and in Midtown Roswell.

Tool #5: Stormwater Management.

Many of Roswell's older retail areas do not meet the requirements of Roswell's water resources protection ordinances. Bringing these areas up to compliance can be relatively costly and difficult to do efficiently. There is a need to consider an expanded City role in providing stormwater treatment and management facilities. It may even be appropriate for the City to subsidize such service in areas targeted for redevelopment. This tool would be most useful in the South Atlanta Street area and Midtown Roswell.

EXPEDITED PROCESSING

One of the primary attractions many already-developed sites have over raw land is the perception that the tenant can occupy the space quickly. In Roswell, such a perception is not always valid and can lead to unrealistic expectations and frustration on the part of the developer and prospective tenant. One solution is to allow expedited processing for redevelopment projects that meet the type of development encouraged in this redevelopment strategy.

Tool #6: Streamlined Approval Procedures.

Projects that meet specified criteria could be officially designated Redevelopment Priority Projects by the Community Development Committee. The first step in assuring a speedy review process would be the assignment of a Redevelopment Priority Project case manager. The case manager would be responsible for preparing an outline of the necessary review and approval process, and communicating this to the applicant. The case manager would work with the applicant to apply to the relevant bodies for expedited approval, as appropriate. Whenever possible and as appropriate, concurrent reviews would be authorized. The case manager would be responsible for shepherding the project through the review and approval process, and providing periodic status updates on the project to the Community Development Committee. This tool could be used throughout the City.

Tool #7: Pre-packaged Site Design Approvals.

An even more direct approach to expedited processing would be to offer pre-packaged site design approvals for sites that had been part of a detailed Redevelopment Plan, such as the Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan. The City could create small Special Area Development Packages to offer to prospective developers, which would not only shorten the redevelopment timeframe but also greatly reduce the risk.

These Special Area Development Packages could be prepared by the City or a Redevelopment Authority for sites where the property owner had agreed to participate, and could include: 1) a development pro forma with suggested mix of uses, development intensity and the identification of issues such as land assemblage; and 2) a detailed site and development plan that illustrates building placement and massing, parking and access. The City would assign a project manager who would be responsible for securing the necessary staff and board approvals for the project. This tool would be most appropriate for areas with a detailed Redevelopment Plan, but could conceivably be used for other key sites throughout the City.

ZONING AND REGULATORY INCENTIVES

Tool #8: Density Bonus.

Given the high cost of land along many commercial corridors, for some parcels it is unlikely that redevelopment will occur unless additional density is allowed. This density can be in the form of commercial and/or residential space, depending on the parcel. While the goal is to reduce the amount of retail space overall, it might make sense for some parcels to convert portions of existing retail space to office or institutional uses and then develop additional retail space on the outparcels close to the street. All in all, the net result could be a reduction in retail space. This would require a zoning change to permit: a) a mixture of uses and b) more intense development where the infrastructure exists to support additional density. It is conceivable that densities of up to eight residential units per acre might be warranted in key redevelopment projects that meet the City's design criteria. Another tool would be to allow for an increase in height of up to 65 feet for office projects on redevelopment sites. This could be patterned after the existing language in the Parkway Village Overlay District ordinance, which provides for a height bonus for projects that meet certain criteria.

TAX TOOLS AND FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

Tool #9: Waive Impact Fees or Development Fees.

Developers always appreciate a reduction in their costs. Waiving impact fees is possible for extraordinary economic development. Impact fees for some redevelopment projects can be significant but are usually relatively minor so the ultimate benefit to the developer may not be that great. Furthermore, when impact fees are waived, the City must find another revenue source to replace them. Another way to reduce developers' costs would be to add to the City Code a provision to waive development (i.e., processing) fees for selected redevelopment projects. These tools are best applied to redevelopment projects that will generate spillover benefits such as tourism, an increase in high-paying jobs or dramatic improvements to a large area.

Tool #10: Allow Property Owners to Co-Finance Infrastructure and Other Improvements through Business or Community Improvement Districts.

Property owners who wish to provide improvements in their areas can form Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) or Community Improvement Districts (CIDs). BIDs are used primarily in downtown development efforts that provide management and promotional services. CIDs are used to provide more intense infrastructure in commercial areas or to help plan for such. Both of these tools require property owners who are willing to pay additional taxes to receive additional benefits.

Tool #11: Tax Allocation Bonds.

A Tax Allocation District (TAD) may be established based on an approved Redevelopment Plan if it meets the criteria set forth in Georgia's enabling legislation. The property taxes received directly by various government entities in the TAD are frozen although the property taxes paid by the property owners are not. As property values rise, the difference in the amount received directly by the government and the amount paid by the property owners is collected and used to pay for infrastructure improvements which have been financed by a bond issue. Since the taxes collected by Roswell are not as significant as those collected by the county and Board of Education, this tool is unlikely to yield much revenue unless the county and the Board of Education can be persuaded to participate. Fulton County and the Board of Education have approved a TAD in South Fulton. The justification for the Board of Education to approve the TAD in South Fulton was the vast increase in the amount of sales tax revenues generated (the school system receives 1 percent under the current SPLOST) which offset the property taxes foregone. Sandy Springs has received approval for a TAD. This tool might be appropriate for Midtown Roswell.

Tool #12: Policy-Driven Budget, Including the Leasing of City Facilities.

A broad goal for the City is to ensure that its budget reflects its policy priorities. The promotion of redevelopment can occur through the location of pocket parks at strategic points in the City, or through the leasing of City facilities in areas needing rejuvenation. It can also occur through infrastructure investments installed in areas targeted for redevelopment.

Tool #13: Downtown Development Authority.

The City could reconstitute its Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to take a direct role in land assembly, parking, and other functions. A DDA has corporate powers, development and redevelopment powers and can act as a redevelopment agency. It also has eminent domain powers, the power to issue revenue bonds, and the power to operate a project. With so many powers at its disposal, it is certain to be an asset in promoting redevelopment throughout the City.

Tool #14: Promote Redevelopment through Siting of Public Facilities.

Even without a DDA, the City can purchase or lease properties for public purposes. Given the growth of the City, it has a need for the expansion of its facilities. The siting of such facilities should not just be determined by immediate availability but also by the long-term impact of those facilities on the development of an area. On February 4, 2002, at the initiation of City Councilwoman Lori Henry, the City adopted a policy giving preference for location of public facilities in existing office, commercial and light industrial space. In addition, the City can give a boost to individual redevelopment projects by guaranteeing to be part of a development.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REDEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Table 4.4. provides a Short-Term Work Program for implementing the Redevelopment Strategy described in this Redevelopment Element. It should be considered in conjunction with the Economic Development Action Plan (see Chapter 3 of this Comprehensive Plan, Table 3-40), as well as more specific implementation measures described for redevelopment plans such as the Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan.

Table 4.4
Redevelopment Strategy Implementation
City of Roswell, 2005-2010

Project	Parties Involved	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Pursue policy-based budgeting to accomplish redevelopment goals, with redevelopment as a priority.	City Administrator and City Council	X	X	X	X	X	X
Continue to consider locating public facilities in redevelopment target areas.	City Administrator and City Council	X	X	X	X	X	X
Implement Midtown Roswell Streetscape Plan (also see separate discussion on implementing that plan).	City (various departments)	X	X	X			
Complete and implement revitalization study and plan for the Holcomb Bridge Road corridor east of GA 400	City (various departments)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Reconstitute Downtown Development Authority, if needed.	Community Development; City Council		X				
Continue to apply for Livable Centers Initiative grants for redevelopment and revitalization studies, plans, and projects.	Community Development; City Council	X	X	X			
Prepare small/target area development packages.	Roswell EDD	X					
Conduct parking needs and options study and implement plan (cross-listed; also see Economic Development Action Plan)	Roswell EDD; Consultant	X	X	X			
Assist where possible in improving access, ingress and egress to outmoded retail centers and upgrade surrounding road networks.	Community Development; Transportation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Promote the conversion of vacant retail space for non-retail uses such as office and institutional, including churches, schools and non-profits.	Roswell EDD	X	X	X	X	X	X
Require that new retail development be constructed in a manner that will make a long-term contribution to the community.	Community Development; City Council	X	X	X			
Continue to promote existing retail space to attract quality retailers.	Roswell EDD	X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop a Redevelopment Marketing Plan.	Roswell EDD		X				
Promote and disseminate information regarding BIDs and CIDs among property owners as a tool and provide support for their creation where this would be well received.	Roswell EDD	X	X	X	X	X	X

MIDTOWN ROSWELL REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

Initial Vision (2000)¹⁰

The Midtown Roswell (SR 9) redevelopment corridor will through redevelopment, become an attractive, lively, mixed-use area that provides linkages with the Historic District and adjacent neighborhoods. Walking to stores and shops in Midtown Roswell will be an attractive option, even preferable to driving from nearby and adjacent residential neighborhoods. The Roswell Redevelopment Strategy recognizes that there is a need for balanced housing, including housing for elderly close to shopping and transportation. The strategy recognizes a practical way to meet such needs is to allow some residential housing at appropriate densities in the redevelopment of properties. With MARTA access, it is possible that some of the occupants of new residences in the corridor will have minimal reliance on automobiles. By relating the redevelopment in Midtown Roswell to the Historic District, both architecturally and functionally, Roswell is assuring that the historical characteristics of the community and community identity are enhanced. Context-sensitive design of transportation improvements will enhance pedestrian circulation, reduce reliance on the arterial, and connect properties and uses.

Adoption by Reference

The Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan, which was previously adopted by the Roswell City Council, is hereby readopted by reference as if fully set forth in this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. While readers interested in the specifics of that plan are encourage to consult the full planning document, certain aspects of the plan including implementation components are summarized in this chapter.

Vision Articulated in the Plan

The Midtown corridor lacks a “there there” – or a recognizable, popular, and synergistic place in which people want to come to, rather than merely pass through or quickly visit and move on. Canton Street is emerging into an identifiable location and should be considered a building block for the corridor. A second potential “there,” the highly visible intersection of Holcomb Bridge Road and Alpharetta Highway, is currently underutilized but represents substantial opportunity due to its crossroads location. Midtown Roswell is generally unattractive and lacks consistency and execution among the land uses. There is poor parcel connectivity between the corridor and nearby residential neighborhoods.

The Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan will build off of the historic character and strength of the southern end of the corridor, including Canton Street and the somewhat less visible but obviously important City Hall complex. The area will capitalize on the market’s desire for true pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use districts and the area’s concentration of affluent households.¹¹

¹⁰ This is based on the Official Roswell Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 12, Midtown Roswell Overlay District.

¹¹ Robert Charles Lesser & Co, Inc. September 4, 2002. Market and Economic Analysis Component for the Midtown Roswell Corridor Redevelopment Study.

Implementation

The Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan provides for a physical blueprint for the ultimate buildout of Midtown Roswell, but its implementation will not occur overnight. The plan will be achieved over time through the construction of a number of independent private and public initiatives. Creative partnerships will be required to realize the desired redevelopment vision in the Redevelopment Plan.

The Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan was submitted to the Atlanta Regional Commission for funding as a Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) project. Although it was not funded, ARC “grandfathered” the Midtown Roswell plan as an LCI project, thereby qualifying projects approved in that plan for funding as a part of ARC’s transportation improvement programs.

The implementation provisions of the Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan call for short-term, mid-term, and long-term actions. Emphasis is placed here on short-term actions. The Roswell Redevelopment Strategy, described in detail in this chapter, encompasses many of the same recommendations (e.g., providing development incentives) as provided in the Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan.

Table 4.5
Midtown Roswell Redevelopment Plan Implementation
City of Roswell, 2005-2010

Project	Parties Involved	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Consider hiring a town designer responsible for working with property owners on redevelopment projects	Roswell EDD; Community Development	X	X				
Consider establishing a development response team, responsible for working with property owners on redevelopment projects	Community Development	X	X				
Continue to consider ways of relieving property owners of burdens of stormwater management and water quality attainment by creating off-site storage serving multiple properties.	City (various departments)	X	X	X			
Develop a parking assistance fund to reduce the upfront costs of parking needed for redevelopment	Finance Department; City Council	X	X				
Plan and fund new street networks in conjunction with private redevelopment, where agreement on cost sharing can be attained.	Transportation Department; Community Development	X	X	X	X	X	X
Design and install Alpharetta Street streetscape per Plan’s recommendations.	Transportation Department; Ga. DOT	X	X	X			
Complete specified safety projects, including pedestrian crossings and traffic signalization and Hog Wallow Creek Bridge.	Transportation Department	X	X	X			
Complete preliminary design of Hog Wallow Creek Greenway	Recreation and Parks Dept.	X					
Install traffic calming measures on specified neighborhood streets within the corridor	Transportation Department	X	X	X			
Construct parking deck near King’s Creek area to foster redevelopment and also tie into transit corridor.	Downtown Development Authority				X		